

War. Though we are grateful to these heroes every day of the year, we recognized that we ought to set aside one day in particular, the last Monday in May, to be especially mindful of the brave men and women who paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

At a time when our Nation mourns more sons and daughters than it did just a year ago, many of whom came from my State of Florida, this Memorial Day takes on additional poignancy. My heart is full of solemn gratitude to each new generation willing to risk their lives for the security of strangers.

We cannot merely make promises on this earnest occasion. We must reaffirm our commitment to the veteran soldiers still with us. We must provide full funding for veterans health care. At this moment in our Nation's history, how can we possibly justify anything but a significant increase in VA's health care budget? Not only have we been engaged in a war overseas, but, just this year, VA cut off enrollment to an entire category of veterans.

During a time when 240,000 veterans nationwide—44,000 in my home State of Florida alone—are being told they have to wait 6 months or longer just to see a doctor, how can we possibly turn our backs on these men and women? These veterans have come to VA seeking care—care we promised them they would get—and we owe it to them to fulfill that promise.

Memorial Day has a duality—at once provoking feelings of both somber meditation for those we have lost in battle and the joyous anticipation of celebrating with family and friends during a holiday weekend. Both reactions are fitting to the memories of those who are no longer with us—we remember and revere their service, and we honor what their sacrifice has brought us—the freedom to be with the people we love and hold dear.

As we and other citizens of this country prepare to enjoy the long weekend, let us take a moment to thank those who gave us a future, at the expense of their own.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, the Senate has confirmed 127 judges nominated by President Bush, including 100 in the 17 months in which Democrats comprised the Senate majority. Twenty-seven have now been confirmed in the other 12 months in which Republicans have controlled the confirmation process under President Bush. This total of 127 judges confirmed for President Bush is more confirmations than the Republicans allowed President Clinton in all of 1995, 1996 and 1997—the 3 full years of his last term. In those 3 years, the Republican leadership in the Senate allowed only 111 judicial nominees to be confirmed, which included only 18 circuit court judges. We have already exceeded that total by 14 percent and the circuit court total by 33 percent be-

fore Memorial Day and with 7 months remaining this year.

The fact is that when Democrats became the Senate majority in the summer of 2001, we inherited 110 judicial vacancies. Over the next 17 months, despite constant criticism from the administration, the Senate proceeded to confirm 100 of President Bush's nominees, including several who were divisive and controversial, several who had mixed peer review ratings from the ABA and at least one who had been rated not qualified. Despite the additional 40 vacancies that arose, we reduced judicial vacancies to 60, a level below that termed "full employment" by Senator HATCH. Since the beginning of this year, in spite of the Republicans' fixation on the President's most controversial nominations, we have worked hard to reduce judicial vacancies even further. As of today, the number of judicial vacancies has been reduced to 44 and is the lowest it has been in 13 years. That is lower than at any time during the entire 8 years of the Clinton administration. We have already reduced judicial vacancies from 110 to 44, in 2 years. We have reduced the vacancy rate from 12.8 percent to 5.1 percent, the lowest it has been in the last two decades. With some cooperation from the administration think of the additional progress we could be making.

If the Senate did not confirm another judicial nominee all year and simply adjourned today, we would have treated President Bush more fairly and would have acted on more of his judicial nominees than Republicans did for President Clinton in 1995 to 1997. In addition, the 44 vacancies on the Federal courts around the country are significantly lower than the 80 vacancies Republicans left at the end of 1997. Of course, the Senate is not adjourning for the year and Chairman HATCH continues to hold hearings for Bush judicial nominees at a rate of between two and four times as many as he did for President Clinton's.

Unfortunately, far too many of this President's nominees raise serious concerns about whether they will be fair judges to all parties on all issues. Those types of nominees should not be rushed through the process. I invite the President to work with us and to nominate more mainstream individuals with proven records and bipartisan support.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. On May 1, 2003, Senator KENNEDY and I introduced the Local Law Enforcement Act, a bill that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

I would like to describe a terrible crime that occurred on February 22, 2003. An Arab-American teenager in

Yorba Linda, CA, was badly beaten by a group of teenagers with bats and golf clubs who were yelling racial slurs. He suffered head injuries, a broken jaw, and stab wounds. Metal plates had to be inserted into his face during reconstructive surgery, and his jaw was wired shut for nearly two months.

I believe that government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

SENIOR HEALTH AND FITNESS

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I rise as chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging to discuss senior health and fitness. May is Older Americans Month and I feel that it is especially appropriate to mention two events occurring this month that help highlight healthy aging.

First, for the past 10 years, the last Wednesday in May has been designated as National Senior Health and Fitness Day. This year is no different and on Wednesday, May 28, 1,500 local organizations in every State of the Union, will again celebrate National Senior Health and Fitness Day, the Nation's largest annual health promotion event for older adults. Local organizations will host a variety of activities tailored to the needs and interests of their communities. Last year these activities included health walks, health screening, and a wide variety of other events. National Senior Health and Fitness Day is an excellent opportunity for seniors of all fitness levels to take part in locally organized health and fitness events. In my home State of Idaho, the Southwest Idaho Area Agency on Aging, the local YMCA, and a host of other organizations have teamed up to hold a walk in Boise. Idaho seniors will walk anywhere from 2 years, to 2 miles, depending on the participant's ability, a reminder that walking and being active are far more important than how far or how fast we travel.

Second, the 2003 Summer National Senior Games, the Senior Olympics, opens Monday, May 26, in Hampton Roads, VA. An estimated 10,000 senior athletes will come together to compete in a wide variety of sporting events ranging from horseshoes and shuffleboard to track and field and the triathlon. It is one of the largest multisport athletic competitions in the world. I especially salute the 15 Idahoans who will be competing. The Senior Olympians are examples to all of us.

The goals for Senior Day are to make exercise fun, to increase awareness of the benefits of a regular exercise program for older adults, and to encourage all older adults to take advantage of the many health and fitness programs